

Fort Gorges
Hog Island Ledge, Portland Harbor
Portland
Cumberland County
Maine

HABS No. ME-134

HABS
ME,
3-PORT,
20-

PHOTOGRAPHS

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FORT GORGES

HABS No. ME-134

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Location: Covering all of Hog Island Ledge, 1.5 acres, in Portland Harbor, Maine.

Present Owner: City of Portland.

Present Status: Unused and unoccupied; can be visited by boat.

Significance: It is a very prominent and intriguing part of the Casco Bay view from Portland's Fort Allen Park and Eastern Promenade, and so viewed by thousands every year. Architecturally it is an unchanged example of mid-19th century coastal fortifications.

Chain of Title: Built and owned by United States Government transferred to the City of Portland for National Monument purposes in 1960.

Date: Begun 1858: Finished 1876, according to Frank Barnes, National Parks Service Regional Historian, or 1865, according to late 19th and early 20th century accounts. Probably the bulk of the work was done or dropped by the end of the Civil War, and some finishing done later.

Architect and Builders: Captain Casey of the U.S. Engineering Corps directed the building (Dunnack, Maine Forts). Col. Reuben Staples Smart, mason and construction engineer, designed it. He also built Fort Barraneas, Fla; Castle Calhoun in Hampton Roads; Pond Island Lighthouse and others, in Long Island Sound; Fort Preble in Casco Bay; and Fort Knox in the Penobscot.

Original Plan: It is similar in size and design to Fort Sumter at Charleston, South Carolina, but it is of granite instead of brick. It is hexagonal in plan, with two tiers of gun casemates on five channel fronts, officers' quarters in the rear wall, and arrangements for additional guns on two fronts of the topmost "barbette" tier. It is at the "bottom" of the main channel entrance to Portland Harbor between House Island and Spring Point. Its guns were designed to back up those of Forts Preble and Scammel and also command certain auxiliary channels, notably Whitehead Passage. (National Archives Plans 13-A and 13-B, Record Group 77.)

Alterations:

No structural changes: by 1902 all guns were removed, and it has not been kept up. The concrete slab just inside the sally port passage may have been the foundation of some auxiliary structure.

Historical Events:

The fort was built for the Civil War but armored ships and high explosive shells made it obsolete by the time it was finished. It may have been manned during the Spanish-American War (1898) when the governors of the coastal states provided State militia for the garrisoning of previously unmanned fortifications. (Suggested by Annual Report of the Adjutant General for 1898). Submarine mines were stored there during the Second World War.

Views:

One view is opposite p. 232 in Dunnack's Maine Forts. There are two views in Souvenir of Portland Maine, compliments of Loring, Short and Harmon (ca. 1900?) (in the Maine Historical Society, "Portland-Views" file). One on p. 9, shows Spring Point Light from Fort Preble, with Fort Gorges in the background, far left; the other picture, p. 11, shows the breakwater and light in Portland Harbor, with steamships, sailing ship, boats, and Fort Gorges in the background. In the Portland Sunday Telegram, Aug. 27, 1939, p. 2, there is a photo of the interior and of the wharf.

Sources:

U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service, "Report on Application by City of Portland... for A Historical Monument," Frank Barnes, Regional Historian, May 1960. (in City of Portland Records).

Henry E. Dunnack, Maine Forts, Charles E. Nash and Son, Augusta, Maine, 1924.

Maine Historical Society, newspapers and photo files.

Portland Sunday Telegram, June 12, 1938, article on Annie Gorges Murch, born in the Fort.

Prepared by: Martha Kingsbury
HABS Maine III
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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural interest and merit: An excellent example of mid-19th century military fortification, especially intended for harbor defense. Contains fine granite and brick masonry vaulting with unusually large amounts of structural metal.
2. Condition of fabric: All masonry is well preserved, but interior finishes and detail are in ruins. Parts of the structure were inaccessible to this survey.

B. Technical Description of the Exterior:

1. This structure is a two level granite fortification, irregularly hexagonal in plan about a parade, with granite wharf or landing. Overall dimensions are 242'6" x 136'6". (Please refer to Field Notes).
2. Foundations: Granite ledge stone and walls.
3. Wall construction: Granite walls in dressed ashlar, hammer finish with rusticated joints. The top coping in smooth finish is stepped.
4. Structural system:
 - a. Brick vaults and granite piers.
 - b. Brick vaults, granite or brick bearing walls.
 - c. Segmented and flat granite arches.
 - d. Brick vaults between metal beams over "H" section beams and girders, northwest section of quarters, first floor only.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: None.
6. Chimney:
 - a. Vents into common flue between casemates to parapet level.
 - b. Brick flues from fireplaces in quarters set into granite walls to parapet above.
7. Openings:
 - a. Portal in north elevation has simple classic surround with

pediment. Drawbridge and doors removed.

b. Doorways into quarters from parade simple rectangular openings. Wood frames and doors removed.

c. Windows:

1. Gun ports are square with iron surrounds flush with wall surface, lineal pattern in masonry surface to define ports.
2. Ventilation slits into magazines in exterior walls. Square ventilators in horizontal course below cornice in magazine wall east end of parade.
3. Windows into quarters, parade elevation, are simple rectangular openings. One wood frame with round head remains.
4. Four latrine ports at water level.

8. Roof: Flat roof covered with earth. The cornice is composed of two projecting courses of granite blocks. Fire granite and brick and/or concrete bunkers and bombproofs are at the parapet level. A segmented parapet wall or firing platform extends along the parapet over the portal. A cannon, off its mount, remains at the northwest corner.

C. Detailed description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans by floor:

a. First level: Sally port from north portal into parade. Gun ports for riflemen open into sally port from adjacent rooms. Quarters on north side of parade, 20 casemates on SW, S, SE, E & W sides of fort. Magazines at NE & NW corners of fort, magazine at east end of parade adjacent to casemates.

b. Second level: Repetition of first level.

2. Stairways:

a. Stairway tower: Separate granite stair tower at west end of parade; semi-spiral stairway about central pier, 20 risers and three landings. Stair to parapet level of 29 risers five landings. No connection to levels of casemates. Fragments of coping course remain.

- b. Stairway tower similar to (a) at east end of parade, enclosed by magazine.
- c. Stair at SE corner of fort, from second level to parapet.
- d. Fragments of wood curved stairway in quarters.

3. Flooring:

- a. Granite slab floor in casemates.
- b. Wood board floors, two parallel layers, over sleepers over cement floor in quarters.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Lime plaster with hair binder on brick or furred out on sawn lathe. Vaulted plaster ceilings below brick vaults of second floor in quarters. Exposed brick and granite elsewhere.

5. Doorways and doors: None remain. Fragments and framing indicate sliding double doors between north and south rooms in quarters.

6. Decorative features: Fragments of window, fireplace and door surrounds; plaster cornice and brackets in quarters east of sally port.

7. Notable hardware: Fragments of entrance hardware, iron brackets at top of the north wall of parade, and brackets over interior of gunports of casemates.

8. Lighting: None.

9. Heating: None. Fragments of fireplaces in quarters.

D. Site:

The structure faces south on Hog Island Ledge, with a wharf extending outwards from portal in north elevation. Granite block paving, iron mooring rings and miscellaneous bolts. Fragments of masonry steps to low tide level, and stump of flag staff. Within view are Forts Scammel and Preble.

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